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Rockbridge Centennial

1871 - 1971



UNION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Centennial Program

- 8:00 a.m. — Display Area Open
Games and Booths In Operation
Registration and Visitation
- 11:00 a.m. — Serving of noon meal begins
Musical entertainment by Rockbridge Rural Rousers 4-H Club
- 1:20 p.m. — Welcoming speech by President of Village Board
- 1:25 p.m. — Introduction of Congressman Paul Findley
- 1:30 p.m. — Address by Congressman Findley
Greg Price leads group singing
Recognition of Mary Tucker, charter member of Magazine Club
Response by Mrs. Tucker
Beard Judging and Awarding of Prizes
Entertainment by Rhonda and Randall Barnett,
(baton twirling and electric guitar selections)
Costume Judging and Awarding of prizes
Recognition of various visitors
- 3:00 p.m. — Visiting Period
Open House at Rockbridge Castings hosted by the Peterson family
Free competitive games for children
Booths and games in operation
- 4:00 p.m. — Band concert by Greenfield Unit School Band
Recognition of late Mr. Troy Burger as Village Historian
- 5:00 p.m. — Serving of evening meal begins
Musical entertainment during meal
- 6:30 p.m. — Introduction of Illinois Representative Jerry Corbett
- 6:35 p.m. — Address by Representative Corbett
Historical skit by Taylor Creek Toughies 4-H Club
Recognition of person who traveled farthest to Centennial
Celebration and person who lived in Rockbridge Post Office
Community the longest time ago
- 8:30 p.m. — Teen-Age Street Dance

Charlotte and Fern

The History of Rockbridge

The "Old Town" before 1871

In the gigantic plan of creation, surely the Great Creator must have added a special touch to the virgin prairies and primeval forests of America's mid-west. Here, in a little corner of Greene County, one such majestic touch was given to that tiny section of the county which was destined to become Taylor's Prairie. Here, too, in by-gone days adventurous pioneers leaving the shelter of their old homes, pushed out into the domain of wild beasts and the scarce less wild brothers, the Kickapoos and the Pottawatomies. Through the trials and hardships, they carved out new homes amid the haunts of nature in its wildest mood. Their deeds deserve a place in history that will long survive the monuments of marble that mark their resting places.



The Old Mill

1826 - 1888

on

Macoupin Creek

Rockbridge, Ill.

A century ago, these now productive acres, these rich grazing lands, and the fertile farms were lying in an almost unbroken wilderness of trees and grasses. They were also the hunting grounds and often the battlefields of the American Indian.

Meandering its way aimlessly through the virgin soil, nurturing the heavy growth of timber along its banks, the Macoupin Creek, or Maquapin (white potato) as the Indians called it, hurried on its way to join the Illinois River. Upon the banks of this creek in what had been known as "Taylor's Prairie", the village of Rockbridge had its origin. The prairie had derived its name from John and Ambrose Taylor who, with Benjamin Allen, had settled here in 1819.

The First Building

The first building in this southeast corner of Greene County was a grist mill erected in 1826 by John Hardcastle and Moses Stephens. A dam across the Macoupin furnished water power to operate the mill. John Barnett bought the mill in 1836, and four years later sold it to George Randle. About 1853, it was sold again; this time to three men (William Gage, G. T. W. Sheffield, and I. R. Ostrom) who added steam power and otherwise improved the mill. With these changes, a lively business began and a cluster of log cabins sprang up. For the next twenty years, the mill was in various hands. When Isaac Bruner came into possession of it, he added a saw mill in order to give year-round work.

Up to this time, the only means of crossing Macoupin Creek, which in the early days was usually high, was by canoe or boat. So, in 1845, a covered bridge was built just south of the mill. This was a boon to transportation in the area.



Covered Bridge over the Macoupin 1845 - 1901

In 1901, a modern steel bridge took the place of this covered one. Even that bridge has been taken away, and the once heavily traveled road has disappeared.

The First Post Office

In 1849, a post office was established and called Rock-bridge. George D. Randle, who was postmaster, kept the office in his residence which was a hewn-log house near the mill. The mail was carried in and out by horseback.

The winter of 1830-31 had long been remembered as "The Winter of the Deep Snow". After that, events were usually reckoned as before or after that severe time.

In the 1850's, a settlement grew up about one-half mile west of Rockbridge, and was known as Dublin. The monument to this little settlement is the well-kept cemetery which marks the spot. The original Catholic church was later moved to Rockbridge and remodeled into a home.

It is difficult to determine just when the first burial was made in this or the other two cemeteries, Witt and Taylor, because the earliest graves are unmarked and no records are available. We do know that in the Witt cemetery the early graves were located among the forest trees when the land was still unclaimed. Tiny family burial places can be found on many farms in the area.

The New Town 1871-1971

In the year 1870, the Rockford, Rock Island and St. Louis Railroad came through, so the village of Rockbridge was moved



Railroad Station and Water Tank

one-half mile northwest of the old mill. It was laid out along the railroad by G. T. Sheffield and George Hudson on July 18, 1871. The railroad company named it "Sheffield" in honor of Mr. Sheffield, which name it retained until the railroad came into the hands of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Co., who changed the name again to Rockbridge, the name of the post office never having been altered.

James Valentine erected the first general store, thereby becoming the pioneer merchant. He also built a grain warehouse and laid in a supply of lumber.

The First House



The first house on the site was built by Samuel Judy in 1860 as a monument to his success in the California Gold Rush.

The first bank was in a tiny brick building which is still standing in what was the business section. As more space was necessary, the bank was moved to a larger building. After the Depression and the Bank Moratorium, the Rockbridge Bank failed to open for business.

The First Bank



**Rockbridge Business Section
in the 1880's and 90's**

By the year 1877, three additions of land had been made to the new village. They were the L. F. Williams, the James Valentine and the Isaac Bruner additions.

Nine Businesses in 1879

The History of Greene County published in 1879 recorded nine flourishing businesses: J. H. and J. M. Valentine, M. R. Blodgett, Kinder & Rives, general merchandise; J. Keeley & Co., drugs Wm. Rhoads, groceries; John Barnett, harness; C. H. Weaver, furniture; Miss Nannie Clark, milliner; Philip Jacobi, blacksmith and agricultural implements; A. Tendick, boots and shoes; Peter Achenbach, meats; D. R. Colman, "City Mills"; J. M. Valentine, grain and lumber. From the same history is this quote: "It (Rockbridge) is well known for the energy of its business men, who claim that there is a greater amount of business done at this place in proportion to its size than any other town in the county".



Tendick's Store
"on the other side of town"

Incorporated in 1885

Rockbridge was incorporated in 1885 with a governing body consisting of a village board and president. There were two hundred inhabitants. In a very short time, the population had increased to three hundred.

Four religious denominations were active. These, in order of their organization were: Baptist, 1837, Catholic, 1865, Methodist, 1872, and Presbyterian which was connected with the Walnut Grove church.

There were three societies, Masonic, Knights of Honor, and Temperance.

An important musical group was the Rockbridge Band, which owned a set of fine instruments and a very handsome bandwagon. The village was rich in musical talent and interest.

Dr. A. E. Miller

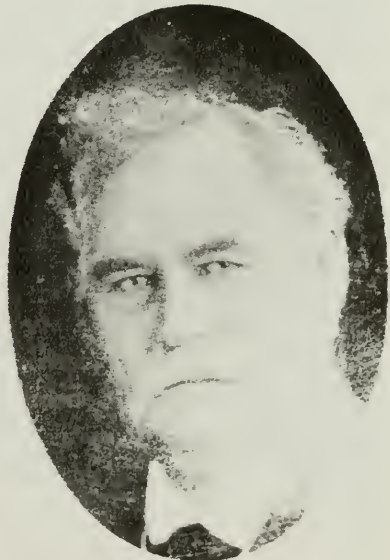
Rockbridge Physician

from

February 16, 1869

to

December 22, 1923



Schools

Just as people of today are interested in education, so did the early pioneers hunger for knowledge. Their only source of reading material at first was from the peddler who passed through the country peddling his great variety of "wares".



**Rockbridge
School
1874 - 1911**

The First School

The first school house was built in 1874, with John Howell as the teacher. It was a two-story frame building, thirty-two by forty-two feet in size and built at a cost of \$2500. The contractor was R. T. Dawson. Fire destroyed the building about the year 1911.

After the destruction of the old building, a new one-story structure was put up on the same site. It served the community as grade and a two-year high school. It, too, was destroyed by fire in 1932. A new grade school replaced it.

School District Organized

In 1923, through an overwhelming vote of the people, a new school district was organized to include a four year high school. The new building was completed and ready for occupancy in the



Rockbridge Grade and Two Year High School



Rockbridge Grade School





Fall of 1924. It was known as Rockbridge Community High School. This reorganization was under the supervision of Fred S. Pewter.

Mr. Pewter, or "Prof" as he was affectionately called by his students, came to Rockbridge in September, 1918. He was instrumental in guiding the growth of the educational system from 1918 to 1943. In these twenty-five years, the Rockbridge Public Schools were an acknowledged factor in helping to sustain the reputation of Greene County for the excellency of her schools. Mr. Pewter was a great advocate of athletics, and all who passed his way learned the value of sportsmanship and fair-play. According to the proverb of three score years and ten, Mr. Pewter gave one-third of the average lifetime in the service of Rockbridge, not only as an educator, but as one who gave of himself for the well-being of others.



Fred S. Pewter

**serving the Rockbridge
school system
1918 - 1943**



Rockbridge Community High School

1924 - 1947

Fire District Organized

Several times during the century, fires have taken their toll. The last one was the Rockbridge Elevator which burned in July, 1968.

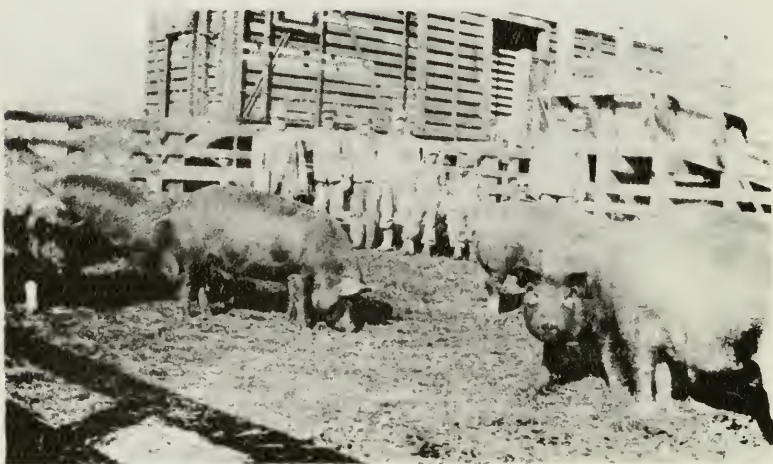
Previous to this, a fire district had been organized for the protection of Rockbridge and the surrounding area.

Two other civic improvements, in addition to the fire department, that have come about during the last decade are the natural gas installation and a water system.



Rockbridge Grain Elevator

During World Wars I and II and the intervening years, railroad transportation was at its peak with four passenger trains making daily stops. There were numerous freight trains loading and unloading merchandise and keeping the village in touch with the outside world. Livestock was shipped almost daily from the surrounding farms.



Rockbridge Stockyards - 1939

Railroads Begin Decline

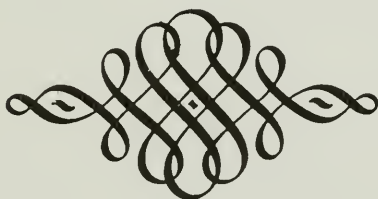
After the close of World War II, and the building of Highway #67, railroad transportation began to decline. One by one the passenger trains were dropped until, in 1962, the faithful old passenger train made its final run. Just as the coming of the railroad was instrumental in building our town, better means of transportation was largely responsible for the decline of this and other small towns.

If we could look into a crystal ball and see the years ahead, perhaps we could envision a rebirth of the smaller, once thriving towns. One hopeful note for our community is the coming of the new factory—Rockbridge Castings Company, owned by the Central Pattern Company of Hazelwood, Missouri.

Rockbridge is surrounded by rich farm land owned, for the most part, by those who operate the farms. The farmers are interested in progress and improvement of their farms.

Our town is comprised of neat, well-kept homes. There are no statues erected in honor of greatness; but the people are steady, law abiding citizens who go quietly about their daily duties, always ready to lend a helping hand to their neighbors.

—Isn't that the policy which has made America great?



Our Town – 1971



**Rockbridge
Baptist Church**



Rockbridge Pentecostal Church



Rockbridge Methodist Church



The Rockbridge Village Board

**Left to right; Stu Scandrett, Water Commissioner; John Ewing,
Bill Griswold, Warren Wagner, Mrs. Eula Terry, Secretary;
Wayne Johnson, Richard Scott and Charles Postel, President.
(Dale Rimbe was absent when photo was taken)**



Wagner Seed & Supply
Warren Wagner, Owner



Rockbridge Castings Co. - Office



Powers AG Market
Mr. and Mrs. Ray Powers, Owners



Terry's Garage
Mr. and Mrs. Miles Terry, Owners



City of Rockbridge – Water Plant



**Rockbridge Volunteer Fire Department
Left to right; Oliver Lee Young, Art Motley, Jack McManus
and Keith Whittaker, Chief**

"Our Little Town"

*We like to live in a little town,
Where the trees meet across the street;
Where you wave your hand and say, "Hello"
To everyone you meet.*

*We like to stand for a moment
Outside the grocery store,
And listen to the friendly gossip
Of the folks who live next door.*

*For life is interwoven
With the friends we learn to know,
And we hear their joys and sorrows
As we daily come and go.*

*So we like to live in a little town,
And care no more to roam;
For every house is a little town
Is more than a house — it's home.*

*(This poem was taken from a place mat at the
"Bronze Lantern" Dinner House and Motel in
Yuma, Colorado, and was loaned to us by Ha-
zel and Glen Hughes, Kilbourne, Illinois.)*

THANK YOU

The Village Board and the Centennial Committee, on behalf of the citizens of Rockbridge and surrounding area, would like to take this means to thank all of the people who, in any way contributed to the success of this, our 100th birthday celebration.

A very special thanks should go to all of the businesses who so graciously donated funds to help us finance our centennial.



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